SOUTHEAST OHIO

WINTER/
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5 Great Hikes

PRISON PAWS
Inmates train canine pals

DIRT ROAD DIVA
ICU nurse climbs behind the wheel of monster truck

AVALANCHE PIZZA MAN • MOYER WINERY • LIFE ALONG THE OHIO RIVER

Editor's Letter

IN OUR HUMBLE REGION, it's easy to overlook all the outstanding people, places and things scattered throughout the hills. Putting together this issue of *Southeast Ohio*, our staff discovered a trove of hidden gems.

When the doldrums of winter become too much, take to the outdoors and discover the five hikes that best capture our region's natural splendor (32). Small towns along the Ohio River, once suffering from economic loss, are now sparking new growth. These business owners and residents have a dream for life along the Ohio River, and they're well on their way to achieving it (22). Tucked away nearby, Moyer Winery offers rows of twisting vines and heaps of hospitality to visitors (8). Even our photo story of the Vinton County Airport showcases the outlasting spirit of our region (42).

Of course, we're also all about fun. John Gutekanst is renowned for his lively culinary creations at Avalanche Pizza and known for his service to the community (35). One woman does double-duty as both a nurse and monster truck driver (28). And we couldn't leave out our love for animals. Read about some Southeast Ohioans who are passionate about turtles (10) and canine buddies who prepare for adoption with the help of inmates (44).

For even more inspiring tales from the region, head to our website. Whether on or off the page, there's always something new to explore in Southeast Ohio.

Brooke Bunce

— BROOKE BUNCE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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ON THE COVER | *Photo by Joel Prince*
Old Man's Cave in Hocking County is a must-see for hikers (32).

ON THE BACK | *Photo by Leah Woodruff*
Moyer Winery & Restaurant's diversity of flavors is displayed in cups of wine (8).

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Southeast Ohio is a nonprofit publication produced two times a year by the School of Journalism students. Editorial business offices are located in Schoonover Center 214, 20 E. Union St., Athens, Ohio, 45701: (740) 597-3136. Subscription rate: $12 for two years, $15 for three years. **Website: southeastohiomagazine.com.**

SOUTHEAST OHIO
WINTER / SPRING 2014

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PHOTO BY BROOKE BUNCE

Painted Patchwork

Quilt barns serve as rustic décor, community emblems and tourist attractions in Vinton County

TUCKED IN THE rolling countryside of Vinton County, 27 barns adorned with painted quilts continue the legacy of the quilt barn with the trail "A Stitch in Time." From the Pine Tree to Horse Squares, each quilt alludes to its location, history or county significance.

"Some people replicate a family quilt they have, so it's kind of special to show it off on the outside of their barn and to preserve it in such a manner," says Suzi Parrons, co-author of *Barn Quilts and the American Quilt Trail Movement*. "For others it's about working with the community and community pride, celebrating where they live and wanting people to know it's a special place. And for some it's just fun."

Originally developed by Donna Sue Groves in 2001, the first quilt barn trail in Adams County was a way to honor her mother, a longtime quilter. Recognizing both the beauty and history of the quilt barn, agricultural communities like Vinton County continue to spur the project's popularity. "What I found out is that we're pretty much alike from rural community to rural community," Groves says. "The last name might change, but we all want the basic things—to be happy, work, be able to raise our family, have joy in our life. We're pretty much the same; that's what ties us together. I like to think of it as we're building ourselves a big quilt across the nation."

More than 6,000 quilt barns are stationed throughout the U.S. and Canada, each of which claims its own beauty and meaning.

— MEGHAN MALONE

Lady of the Law

IN 1976, Sheriff Katherine Crumbley of Belmont County was awarded the title of Ohio's First Female Sheriff. Although Crumbley was one of the first females elected in the state, it was Vinton County's Maude Collins who earned the title almost 50 years before her, and the county's historical society made sure she was recognized.

Collins was not your typical 1920s housewife. She was working as a small town jail matron when her husband, the Vinton County sheriff, died in the line of duty in 1925. County commissioners asked Collins to take her husband's place as sheriff immediately after his funeral. She agreed, and a year later Collins was elected to the role of Vinton County sheriff.

Throughout her career, "Sheriff Maude," as she was known to many, gained national fame for her incredible detective work and career firsts as a female sheriff. She infamously cracked the case of the "Axtel Ridge Murders," a double homicide in which a young woman brutally murdered her boyfriend's parents for their inheritance money in 1927. The case, and Collins' work, was noted in *Master Detective* magazine, which gave her notoriety around the country.

Collins remained sheriff for the rest of her elected term and then moved on to become the clerk of courts. After her term ended there she became matron for the Columbus State School until she retired. Collins passed away in 1972 at the age of 78 and was buried alongside her husband in Hamden Cemetery in Clinton. The historical society nominated Collins for the Ohio Hall of Fame in 1976, but it wasn't until Oct. 24, 2000 when she was officially inducted.

— MOLLY WHEATLEY

Reel Good Time

OWNING THE SKYVIEW Cruise-In was always Walt Effinger's dream. He worked the reels of the drive-in theater in Lancaster for 30 years, following in the footsteps of his projectionist father. That dream was finally realized when Effinger purchased the theater in 1994 from its previous owner, Carlos Crum.

The theater has seen some remodeling since—Effinger took on the task of converting all projection and sound equipment to a new digital format—but the theater still offers a nostalgic trip for some and new memories for all. Walt and his wife, Cathie, who runs the concession stand, call Skyview "the place to be."

"We take very much pride in it being clean, well kept, in a friendly atmosphere and a fun place to come to," Walt says.

The theater's 2014 season begins the first Friday of April.

— NIKKI LANKA

Cathie and Walt Effinger
PHOTO BY MINGRAN MA

PHOTO BY BROOKE BUNCE

Grave Encounters

IF YOU EVER SEE someone on all fours in Mound Cemetery, camera and trowel at the ready, don't freak out—it's probably Chris Painter. When the Marietta resident bought her first digital camera in 2004, her goal was to photograph every tombstone in Washington County. "That was a bit ambitious of me," Painter says, though she has photographed all the tombstones in more than 100 cemeteries.

Painter's mission is no morbid curiosity. A city employee by day, Painter's been bitten by the genealogy bug—not an uncommon occurrence in a town full of history. Earlier this year, she founded Marietta Cemeteries Coming Alive (MCCA), a collective of local history buffs who hope to tell the untold stories of those buried in the city's three historic cemeteries: Mound, Harmar and Oak Grove. Painter tries to lead work days at least once a month in the cemeteries, where volunteers help clean and preserve the time-weathered, often illegible headstones. "These stones are just not going to be here forever," she says.

Want to get in on the action? The MCCA has enlisted the help of Richland County's Mark Morton, better known as the Gravestone Guardian of Ohio, to lead a public gravestone restoration workshop in May. Morton uses an epoxy resin to piece together stones that have fallen apart and enjoys teaching his methods.

— CARINA BELLES

Dancing Tree Distillery owner Kelly Sauber | PHOTOS BY STEVEN TURVILLE

Spirited Venture

MEIGS COUNTY'S DANCING TREE Distillery sits on a quiet, country road. Inside, visitors find unique, spirited concoctions created from local ingredients.

Behind the one-man production is Kelly Sauber, a friendly, bearded distiller who started the company from the ground up. Sauber, a native of Athens, began home-brewing over two decades ago. He has worked in various breweries in the Athens and Cincinnati areas, including Jackie O's Pub & Brewery in Athens.

The distillery has quickly gained attention since its creation in 2011 by promoting a focus on ingredients harvested on nearby farms. Currently, Dancing Tree offers gin, vodka, coffee liqueur, sorghum rum, elderberry brandy and the distinctly Appalachian pawpaw brandy. Sauber utilizes his biology background to build his own equipment and formulate high-quality spirits. He emphasizes that 85 percent of his ingredients are grown within 20 miles of the distillery—honey from Circle B Apiary in Circleville, sorghum from Starline Organics in Athens, grapes from Shade Winery in Shade and spicebush berries from Integration Acres in Albany—just to name a few.

"If we can get local, non-genetically modified ingredients, it supports our community and the environment; we buy from companies who share this philosophy," Sauber says.

In March 2013, Dancing Tree won a silver medal for its gin from the American Distilling Institute's 7th Annual Judging of Artisan American Spirits.

Throughout the summer months, Sauber offers free tours every Friday, which include a tasting. Customers can purchase Dancing Tree spirits on the premises. Liquor stores in the Columbus, Athens and Dayton areas, as well as bars in Athens, also carry Dancing Tree products.

Sauber credits a dream he had years ago for inspiring the name Dancing Tree. Through a combination of initiative, a love for his roots and a passion for spirits, that dream has become a reality.

— KELLIE RIZER

PHOTO BY LESLIE HOCK

Best in Show

ABOUT A CENTURY and a half ago, Gen. John Logan declared a day of observance for soldiers who had fallen during the Civil War in the small Southeast Ohio town of Ironton. That declaration has grown into a lively celebration with up to 25,000 spectators lining the streets every May for the Ironton Memorial Day Parade.

Approximately 2,000 people march in the parade, all following the riderless horse leading the event. Everyone from business owners to townspeople pitch in to make each Memorial Day better than the last.

"I think most people that live in Lawrence County and Ironton are very proud of our parade and continue to support it every year," says Janie Payne, secretary at the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce. "Property owners along the parade route make sure that their property is all spruced up as the parade goes by and the stores downtown support it by decorating their store windows in a patriotic way."

The parade is dedicated to its initial goal of remembering veterans. Members of different branches of the military immediately follow the parade's lead horse. Every year the Ironton Memorial Day parade committee selects a special veteran as Honorary Grand Marshal.

In 1978, Ironton was officially recognized for its annual tradition when then U.S. Rep. Clarence Miller gave the parade the title of the oldest continuous Memorial Day celebration in the nation. Ever since, the parade has been growing in size every year.

"Everyone that you talk with during the year looks forward to the next Memorial Day Parade," Payne says. "We always hope for a beautiful day for the people who march in the parade and the beginning of summer."

— EMILY VOTAW

PROVIDED BY PATRICK SIMS

Art on Wheels

A MOUNTAIN BIKE, a tightly packed backpack and the occasional lunch to-go are all part of Patrick Sims' commute to work. Unlike many of his 9-to-5 peers, Sims does not have a set place he likes to work; he just rides to a spot he wants to paint. Sims has been an on-the-go cyclist for two years and a full-time painter for six years now, bringing old county homes and water scenes in Ross County to life in his oil paintings. Like Sims himself, his painting box is designed for travel, opening up into an easel for quick setup. Sims says painting every day is like fishing: You only catch a big one once in a while, but as long as you're having fun, it's worth it.

— CHRISTA LAMENDOLA

Cache 'em all

AS THE WINTER SNOW begins to melt, an outdoor adventure is an enticing weekend activity. This past summer, the city of Cambridge in Guernsey County opened a new eight-cache geotrail.

To begin, participants must register and create a "cache handle," or geocaching tag, at www.geocaching.com. The next step is to print out the puzzle on the Cambridge/Guernsey County website. As they navigate Guernsey County, treasure hunters can record their caches with their newly created cache handle and fill in the secret word for each cache on the puzzle.

"Geocaching can be done all year," says Debbie Robinson, executive director of the visitors bureau. "Our trail takes about two and a half hours to complete and is open seven days a week, 24 hours a day."

But the treasure hunt stimulation does not have to end in Guernsey County. Athens and Washington counties have geotrails to try as well. Adventurers might as well "cache 'em all!"

— MELISSA THOMPSON

PROVIDED BY CAMBRIDGE/GUERNSEY COUNTY VISITORS & CONVENTION BUREAU

Moyer Winery grows several varieties of grapes along the Ohio River.

Vineyard in the Valley

River views, award-winning wines and elegant dining await visitors at Moyer Winery & Restaurant

Story by **Jess Miller** | Photos by **Leah Woodruff**

Off the meandering Highway 52 surrounded by leafy grape arbors lies Moyer Winery, a truck-stop-turned-restaurant you don't want to miss while driving along the Ohio River.

The Adams County riverside structure has been host to various crowds throughout its 87-year history—from truckers to diners, and gamblers to drinkers. But since 1972, it has hosted just one kind of customer: visitors who revel in the delicious food and wine first created by its original owners, Mary and Ken Moyer.

Before it was a truck stop, the building was a speakeasy in the 1930s, when the liquor washed away the despair and dust of a town in the throes of the Great Depression. Midway through the decade, a storm of ferocious intensity rushed the banks of the river, decimating hopes and flooding the entire town. The current dining room was submerged under 6 feet of swirling, muddy water.

Now, the pristine dining room of glass and shimmering crystal shows no sign of the restaurant's turbulent past. The dining room opens up into an expansive patio that overlooks rows of grape arbors and well-maintained lawn and gardens that slope toward the Ohio River. Here customers can watch barges and pleasure boats float by leisurely. Decorated with flowers and native bottles of wine, the restaurant brings back memories from earlier days.

"It was just a general feeling of celebration, [before the Depression] that when you came in, everybody was happy, and dressed up," laughs Cindy Gilkison, the general manager of the restaurant. "Back then, the women had their jewelry and their furs, and it was such a classy place to have here in the middle of nowhere. Men opened the door for the ladies."

Gilkison, who speaks with a soft, Southern Ohio accent, is one of the nine current owners of the restaurant. When the Moyers retired in 1999, Gilkison and 11 other close friends volunteered to take over and run the place. Teachers, servers and friends rotated managing positions at the winery.

Although no longer in charge, Ken and Mary continued to live next to the restaurant for the next five years.

"This was home to them," Gilkison says. "It was nice to have [Ken] next door, especially with the winery. His expertise was very helpful."

> "It's real rustic and charmed. It's not just your cookie-cutter-type place."
> – CINDY GILKISON

Some of their more popular red wines, like the ripe and rich River Valley Red and Cabernet Sauvignon, are concocted using homegrown DeChaunac and Chambourcin grapes, while the more mellow, crispy River Valley White and Chardonnay use the Vidal Blanc grapes. Although Ken tended to favor the dry wines, Gilkison says that in later years, he developed wines that catered to a sweeter palate, including their now-famous raspberry wine.

The winery attracts a sizeable new customer base each year, but Gilkison has found that many who visit—whether from Cincinnati, Dayton or Columbus—are not first-time customers; many make the pilgrimage every year.

"A lot of what I've heard over the past couple of years is, 'Oh, my grandmother used to take me here, or my parents brought me here when I was younger,'" Gilkison says. "Now they're coming here on their own and bringing their children. That's pretty neat, that they remembered it from years ago."

The winery is a positive destination for Adams County, which has been wracked by economic hardship for decades. Deserted storefronts, graffitied businesses and gutted homes line the main street of nearby Manchester, which Gilkison says has suffered from repeated flood damage because of its close proximity to the river.

Manchester was once a thriving river town. It was the largest town in Adams County during an era when steamboats en route from Portsmouth to Cincinnati made frequent stops. It blossomed until the 1930s, and at one time was home to a pork-processing company, tobacco warehouse and mill. But after the Great Depression, the jobs left—and the people did, too.

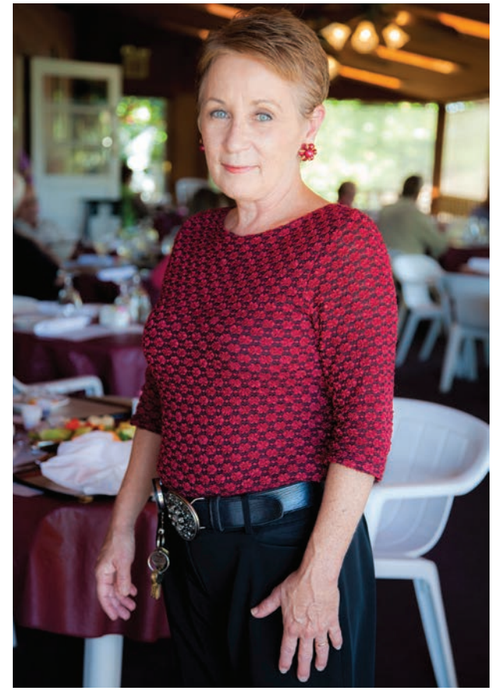
"Being in rural, Appalachian Ohio…I don't think it's on the priority list to get all that squared away up there," Gilkison says, referring to the lack of attention the region garners from the state.

Gilkison believes that the history of the winery, combined with its scenic setting, is what keeps folks coming back each year. "It's real rustic and charmed. It's just not your cookie-cutter-type place," she says.

For those seeking a daylong riverside adventure and a delicious taste of the region's wines, Moyer Winery remains one of Southeastern Ohio's hidden treasures. ◆

WEB EXTRA

Are you salivating over these Moyer Winery photos? Check out our web-exclusive slideshow of this gorgeous local getaway on our website, **southeastohiomagazine.com**.



FROM TOP: Cindy Gilkison, general manager of the restaurant, is a lifelong resident of Adams County; The award-winning raspberry wine is a favorite among customers who enjoy sweeter tastes.

An eastern box turtle, one of the more common species in Southeast Ohio.

Under the Shell

Some people write poems about turtles. Others study and save them. See why Southeast Ohioans are crazy for these creatures.

Story by **Jackie Runion** | Photos by **Provided**

In our region, it's not unusual to see a turtle forging a risky journey across the road, sunbathing on a log along a riverbank or slipping through the grass. Area turtle experts and turtle lovers agree that the shell-dwellers are fascinating, complex and, above all, worth saving.

COLD-BLOODED LOVE

Southeast Ohio is home to around 10 species of turtles, from the pet-store staple red-eared slider to the spiny softshell turtle. Although many people don't think twice about turtles, other Southeast Ohioans passionately appreciate these languid reptiles.

Jill Rosser, a contemporary poet and creative writer at Ohio University, wrote and published the poem "Eastern Box" after helping a turtle across the road. Pulling over and helping these animals across treacherous paths is a simple way to help the world, she says.

Rosser's interaction with the turtle as well as the sheer beauty of its anatomy inspired her. "One of the things that made me write the poem was not just the way the turtle shell felt, but it was so beautifully painted. It's got these sorts of hieroglyphics that look like they mean something," she says. "They're called eastern box, and it seemed like one of those beautiful lacquered Asian jewelry boxes."

Along with the splendor of the turtle, Rosser realized how different they are from most living things. "Picking this turtle up that had this little vulnerable head sticking out, going as fast as he could across the street … I didn't expect it to feel so heavy," she says. "It struck me as something extremely valuable in my hands."

After picking up the turtle, Rosser noticed how it had retreated and sealed itself inside the shell, an action she says made her feel "like it was going to share some secret of the universe with someone but it wasn't going to be me."

Julie Zickefoose, a certified turtle rehabber and nature writer from Marietta, shares that appreciation.

"You'll see turtles near shopping malls, and you can't just leave them," she says, explaining what motivated her to dedicate time to rehabilitate turtles. Nursing reptiles back to health is labor-intensive, but it's a challenge she finds rewarding.

Rosser says while visiting with friends, the group attempted to coax the family's pet turtle out of its shell with food and encouraging words, but came up short. When the 8-year-old daughter of the house came to the turtle, however, and held it close, the turtle sprung out of its shell and began wriggling with excitement.

"She wasn't feeding it. It was just that the turtle knew her voice and knew her and was happy. I never thought I would see a turtle be happy, and I think since then I've had a deeper respect for the life they have in that [shell]," Rosser says.

FROM THE WILD TO HOMES

Unnatural causes threaten the area's turtle population. Once commonly found eastern box turtles are now listed as a "species of concern," and spotted turtles have made the "threatened species" list.

Zickefoose said that keeping turtles as pets comes with a lot of misconceptions. "Turtles have the potential to live for hundreds of years, but people don't always know what to do with them [as pets]," she says.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has laws regulating the capture of wild turtles. Ohio residents are permitted to capture and keep up to four animals on the agency's approved list. The red-eared slider, the eastern musk, the northern map and the midland painted turtles are permitted because these species are still considered safe in terms of numbers.

Willem Roosenburg, a conservation biologist at Ohio University, does not denounce keeping turtles as pets but offers pointers on how to help a turtle live out its potentially long life span. "Be committed to having that animal for a very long period of time, at least if you're going to take care of it. And it doesn't take much to take good care of a turtle," he says. "All you have to do is feed them and keep them clean."

Zickefoose and Roosenburg point out that people often don't realize that turtles are unlike carnival-prize goldfish or beach store hermit crabs—they're in it for the long haul. Roosenburg even jokes that owners write turtles into their wills. "People get [turtles], and it's like 'Oh my God, I'm going to have to hand this down to my kids!'" he says.

The turtle trade has contributed to the growing populations of the invasive red-eared slider, a pet-store staple. Roosenburg explains that because this invasive species has done so well, they are sold by the thousands in pet stores.

"They're an incredibly successful species of turtle," he says. "They are so good at colonizing that they displace the native turtles."

CONSERVATION AND REHABILITATION

Researchers and conservationists are undertaking extensive preventative and wellness efforts to ensure the longevity of native turtle species.

Roosenburg and his colleagues have successfully petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to place turtle species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) list. Inclusion on this list protects turtles against exportation and other harmful practices.

Roosenburg's goal is to keep turtles alive and thriving. He says that petitioning to protect turtles from exportation and exploitation is not an easy task, but it is well worth it.

"I am an academic, where my job is 'publish or perish,'" he says. "But protecting them is one of the most important things I've ever done in my life." ◆

Eastern Box

Like any other revelation, it came
at an inconvenient time: pouring rain,
running late, end of a hectic week.
I pulled over because the last time
I'd vowed the next time I would.
They blunder across the macadam —
you swerve, and later return to find
a shiny wet mosaic of turtle.
This one was smack in the middle,
nudging itself over the double yellow
at an idiotic pace, fool's head out and up.
I bent down and grasped it.
The heft stopped me when I rose.
now two fools with one head
huddled in the road while my wipers
thunked a thick tattoo, like heartbeats
on carapace, driver's door ajar.
The heft signified more than turtle.
Then I heard and felt it groan:
the intricately hinged doors of the plastron
grinding shut. The shell was smooth
and dark and hard, with blazing
yellow bird's-head glyphs
In perfect symmetry skirting the dome.
It was a high, gleaming dome,
Arched in mad exaggeration
of any conceivable terrapin need
for height, drama, dignity.
I kept standing there until
my whole body formed a question,
my future emptied for what might
now fill and direct it, my sometime
soul, my mind, open wide, prepared.
But it had shut. It was staying shut.
As if an ancient, lidded bowl
bearing the jewel-heavy wisdom of the ages
had been proffered, turned over to me.
To me. Right here in rural Ohio.
Then sealed before I could see.
Had I reached for it too casually,
or distractedly? Too dutifully?
How many times has the world
called to me when I was not ready,
how many times have I heard it
groan in just that way, withdrawing,
waiting for me to walk it back to safety
in the culvert grass? To slide into my car,
sodden, disappointed, and slam my own door
as the only viable reply?

— J. ALLYN ROSSER

Danny Yahini builds tiny energy-efficient homes, including this 18-feet-by-8-feet microhouse called the Butterfly.

It's a Small World

Showing that bigger is not always better, a local builder creates tiny homes full of character

Story by **Jacob Corrigan** | Photos by **Audrey Kelly**

When Danny Yahini moved to the U.S. from Israel in 1976, he had no experience in homebuilding. Fast-forward 37 years and Yahini has become the "tiny home" guru of Athens.

Yahini's specialty has always been in building smaller, energy-efficient homes. However, three years ago, the Athens County resident decided to build a tiny home when he believed he had come up with a somewhat new concept. Little did he know, there was a movement toward tiny homebuilding beginning on the West Coast.

Many credit author Sarah Susanka with starting the tiny home movement after the release of her book *The Not So Big House* in 1997. With the economy and the housing market struggling, the movement has since grown, creating a cheaper and more efficient housing option than the traditional market.

The Yahini homes range in size, but an average tiny home measures approximately 18 feet by 8 feet—the size of a utility trailer.

"It is great if you need a place to live but don't own a piece of land," Yahini says. "Finding a piece of land and settling down can be tricky. You may invest in a place and then may have to move for a job and leave the house. This way you can always have your house with you."

The homes are extremely energy efficient. They are "superinsulated with Styrofoam" and can be heated with a small space heater in the winter. Each home features a full-size shower with a 12-gallon electric water heater. Electric costs can be less than $15 per month and a propane tank for cooking can last over six months. Some homes feature beds that are already in place; however, the smaller homes include a couch with a pullout bed.

Erica Magnus returned to Athens from Minnesota last year and was in need of an inexpensive living arrangement. Magnus contacted Yahini and moved into one of his first tiny homes, currently located on his property. She says that if you use energy efficiently, electric bills can be kept under $10.

FROM LEFT The living room of the Butterfly features a pullout couch; Danny Yahini shows off his Athens County workshop.

> "You may invest in a place and then may have to move for a job and leave the house. This way you can always have your home with you."
>
> **– DANNY YAHINI**

"It's wonderful. I really enjoy living there. My electric bill is very low. Last month's bill was about $4.86," Magnus says. "I have an art studio I work in, but I find that I have enough space in the home to work there, especially with all the windows and natural light."

Yahini's business, Yahini Homes, typically charges around $20,000 for one of the tiny structures. His most recent home was built in two months, and he says he can deliver it anywhere in the country. Their small size allows him to build houses from his home workshop instead of building on-site.

A quick glance at the Tiny House Listings website shows tiny homes across the country being sold for as little as $3,000 and up to $25,000 or more. A wide range of people—including the elderly, who may be looking to downsize, as well as recent college grads seeking a cheap way of living without buying land—purchase the homes.

Currently, Yahini rents two homes on his rural property. However, at a moment's notice, he can transport the houses to another location. He builds some on top of trailers, but others can be lifted onto them and moved. The homes can be placed virtually anywhere, as long as the owner can procure electricity.

"It is the quality and construction of a high-end house," Yahini says, who adds that the small home is not like an RV. "I have been building super energy-efficient houses for the last 20 years. I'd much rather keep doing these."

For four years after coming to the U.S., Yahini lived in a converted van and traveled the country, searching for an escape from the city. He began his career with small woodworking projects and eventually moved from crafting household furniture to entire houses. That's what brought the young Israeli to Athens.

"It's very low-key. Not a lot of zoning. You don't have to jump through hoops to do stuff here," Yahini says. "Everybody seems to help each other here."

He notes that a typical full-size house could cost $150,000 or more, but tiny homes give owners a fully functional, personalized structure for a fraction of the cost.

With his interest in energy efficiency, Yahini's dream for the future is to move forward by creating more solar-powered homes. ◆

SHOOT FOR *FLAVOR*

Story by **Christa Lamendola** | Photo by **Adam Birkan**

Bagging a deer, wild turkey and other wild game can give you bragging rights on your good aim and the chance to show off your cooking skills. Wild game is fresher to eat than store bought meats and lower in total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol. With the right ingredients and techniques, your catch could make a delicious dinner.

For a little expert advice, we talked to several Southeast Ohio hunters. Jerry Meyers, who grew up hunting in Monroe County, enjoys game meat with almost every meal. His hunting buddy Dewey Thompson also has experience in the kitchen. And Justin Goebel, who says Washington County is his favorite hunting spot, has been hunting and cooking since he was 7 years old. Here are their cooking tips.

1 KEEP IT FRESH

The faster you get your meat from the woods to the kitchen, the better the taste. For most cuts of meat, the trick is to immediately add moisture before packaging it for the fridge or freezer. Grab a plastic bag and put in water, milk or a marinade before you store the meat. This will keep it fresh and flavorful for cooking. "The most important thing is to clean your animal as soon as possible to prevent gamey taste," Goebel says.

2 PACK IN NUTRIENTS

Unlike most farm-raised animals, animals in the wild do not eat a controlled diet. Woody foods like bark, fallen leaves and twigs are core parts of many animals' diets and very low in nutrients. To combat the lack of nutrients in game meats, pack your meals with vitamins and minerals. Cook game in broth with vegetables to keep meat moist while adding flavor and nutrients.

3 HEAT THINGS UP

Undercooking or overcooking game meat can ruin the flavor of your meal. Venison absorbs heat very well. Because of this, it continues to cook after being removed from heat. To avoid overcooking, follow the "one degree below" rule. If you like your steak medium rare, sear it until it's rare, then remove it from the heat. Your steak will continue to cook to reach medium rare. Squirrel, rabbit and wild turkey cook similarly, becoming tough and chewy if overdone. "Most people that don't like venison don't like it because it's not cooked right," Meyers says.

4 PULL OUT THE CROCK-POT

The slow cooker is the way to go to make sure your dinner is cooked to perfection. It's also a good way to make sure it is moist and tender. Wild animals like deer are well-muscled, so the texture of the meat is much chewier if cooked improperly. "With squirrel and many other kinds of small mammals, cooking them on a grill, broiler or pan frying will not work very well. In my experience only a long, slow simmer will work well," Meyers says.

Deborah Murray, a nutritionist and assistant professor at Ohio University, recommends cooking methods that use moisture, such as stewing or slow-cooking in a Crock-Pot.

5 FORGET THE SALT

When making soup, one of the best sources of salty taste comes from the bones. The key to putting that flavor into soup is in the way you cook the meat. First, slow cook your meat before adding broths and other ingredients to your soup. When the meat starts to slowly break off the bone, remove the bones and set them aside. Add your broth to the soup, put the bones back in and they will simply float to the top for easy removal and an extra savory taste.

RECIPES TO GET YOU STARTED

Squirrel of Mushroom

Meat from 2-3 squirrels
2 cups flour
4 tablespoons seasoning (your choice of salt, pepper and a strong herb like a bay leaf)
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 can cream of mushroom soup (1-2 cans of water)
½ cup chopped onion
1 green pepper
2 cloves of garlic, minced

1. Cut meat into pieces: front legs, back legs, rib cage and back.
2. Mix salt, pepper and other spices to taste in flour. Dampen meat and coat in the flour mixture.
3. Brown meat in oil on the stove.
4. Mix a can of cream of mushroom soup with one or two cans of water. Add onion, green pepper and fresh garlic to soup with other spices of your preference.
5. Place meat in the bottom of the slow cooker and pour soup mixture over meat.
6. Cook for 6-8 hours or until meat pulls easily away from the bone. Remove meat from bones. Serve over rice or noodles.

— Recipe provided by Jerry Meyers

Deer Fajitas

1 pound of lean deer meat
1 bottle of fajita marinade
¼ cup of mushrooms
¼ cup green pepper
sour cream
chopped lettuce
shredded cheese

1. Cut the meat into ½-inch strips.
2. Place meat in plastic storage bag or covered bowl and pour marinade over top. Marinate meat overnight to maximize flavor.
3. Slice onion and pepper into strips.
4. Place heavy duty aluminum foil on a hot grill and cook the meat and other ingredients until the meat strips are pink in the middle.
5. Serve on a burrito wrap with sour cream, chopped lettuce and shredded cheese.

— Recipe provided by Dewey Thompson

Noah Hogan and his mother, Mary Hogan, show off Crabby, the key character in his stories.

A Dash of Inspiration

With the help of his mom, Noah Hogan crafts cookbooks for children starring a hard-shelled friend

Story by **Molly Wheatley** | Photos by **Laura McDermott**

Crabby the Red Rock Crab is a crustacean who loves to cook. He's also the star of Noah Hogan's books for children.

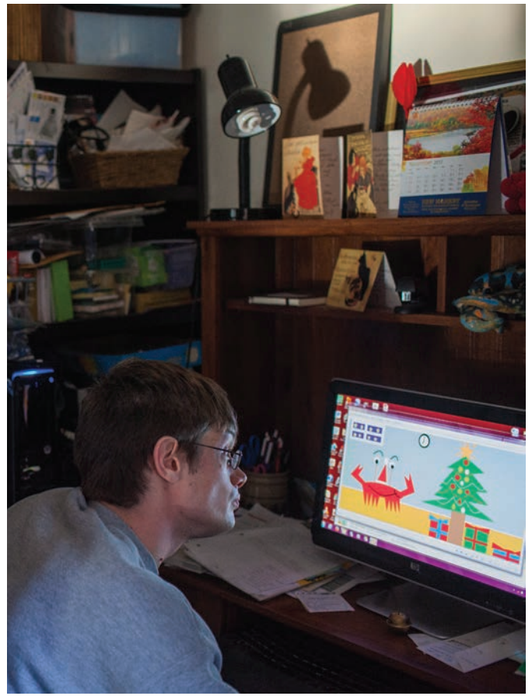
Noah is an artist of many talents. The 25-year-old has illustrated and published two children's cookbooks and is becoming a budding Athens County celebrity with his assorted artwork and stories. The books, called *Crabby Bakes a Cake* and *Crabby Grows a Pot of Soup*, are children's cookbooks featuring Crabby, who cooks with all organic ingredients and creates adventures for himself in the kitchen. The books end with an organic recipe for readers to try themselves.

Noah's cookbooks bring smiles to young readers and a healthy pinch of education.

Noah is an artist with autism. Despite what others may see as a limitation, he has excelled in his work and continues to share his artistic talents with the community and the world. Twice a week, he works at Passion Works Studio in Athens, which is an art studio that welcomes artists with developmental disabilities. While he is there, Noah specializes in computer artwork and makes pieces of art that both captivate and delight viewers. Through his work came the idea to create a series of books. The books bring together all of Noah's passions: art, cooking, health and travel.

When Noah began creating artwork that incorporated Crabby, a friend saw his work and suggested he create books and stories based off of him. The first two books had the main character at home cooking with friends; the next ones are going to have Crabby traveling the world.

> If you really like something enough you should just go for it, and hopefully, people like what you have done, too.
>
> **– NOAH HOGAN**



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Using a computer, Noah Hogan designs a concept for a Crabby holiday-themed story; Noah ponders ideas for future Crabby products; Crabby also appears on Christmas cards.

Noah's goal in creating the books is not just to give children a cookbook and educational story, but to do so with a concern for health, as well as bring in elements of his favorite foods.

"I really have a high regard for health, so everything in the recipes is organic," Noah says. "I also really like chocolate, so in the first book I put in an organic chocolate cake recipe." Noah continues this in his second book by creating an organic vegetable soup recipe.

Although all of the illustrations and stories are Noah's ideas, he has a little help from his mother, Mary Hogan, to bring it all together. Mary and Noah couldn't fund all the projects themselves, but they have a helping hand that continues to give as long as Noah has ideas.

PersonnelPlus, an Athens County program that helps adults find meaningful work, has encouraged Noah to continue creating art and stories. Through this organization and state funding, Noah was given the kickstart for his children's cookbooks.

"They paid for the printing of the books. I helped him write the stories, and he does all the illustrations on the computer," Mary says.

Along with the success of Noah's cookbooks, Noah and Mary are going to use the popular crab character to make other items too, like tote bags and ornaments.

Noah gives advice to those wanting to reach their goals that anyone could agree with: "If you really like something enough you should just go for it, and hopefully, people like what you have done, too."

How could young readers not love Crabby, stirring a pot of soup with his claw, a chef's hat perched on his hard-shelled head? ◆

INTERESTED IN PURCHASING ONE OF NOAH HOGAN'S COOKBOOKS?

Visit the Crabby ArtWorks Facebook page at **Facebook.com/Pages/Crabby-ArtWorks**.

With 1,500 varieties of pansies to care for, Bob's Market is one of the busiest greenhouses in the U.S.

Room to Bloom

In Meigs County, a flourishing flower industry is brightening gardens near and far

Story by **Neal Patten** | Photos by **Kate Alexander**

Bob's Market is not your average greenhouse. Walking into the Mason, West Virginia, business is like walking into Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, but rather than conveyor belts carefully mixing chocolate, machinery is combining precise, computerized recipes to produce soil and transplanting seedlings into flats. Hundreds of thousands of blossoms stretch in every direction in hues of gold, rust, purple and lilac. These are fall pansies—a winter hardy that will be the focus at Bob's through the warmer spring months to come.

For over a century, much of Southeast Ohio made ends meet through coal mining. However, as the mining economy declined during the mid-1900s, another opportunity blossomed.

In 2012, Ohio was the 10th largest producer of flowers in the U.S., according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Greenhouses with a minimum of $10,000 in annual sales covered 26 million square feet of the state—the fourth largest total in the U.S. behind California, Florida and Michigan. Closer to home, the National Agricultural Statistics Service ranks Meigs County as 10th overall for highest annual wholesale of flowers out of the 88 counties in Ohio.

Hal Kneen, the horticulture educator for Ohio State University's Meigs County Extension office, explains why Meigs County is favorable for greenhouses. First, the low-lying, flat regions populating the county are ideal for growth as opposed to the Appalachian foothills that dominate the landscape in other counties. Second, Ohio's temperate climate has been vital to sustaining the floriculture industry in the region. Although growing is limited to greenhouse facilities, the natural mid-range temperatures in the area make for less heating and cooling needs.

At Bob's, 600 baskets of flowers spin overhead, suspended from hooks on a rotating belt. The concrete floor is warm to bare feet, as heated water is pumped beneath to offset the need for natural gas. Past the near-endless aisles of pansies is a sea of green: 25,000 individual fern plants carefully being tended to through their nine-month growth period. The roof is completely automated and computer-operated. Dozens of glass ceiling panels open and close on their own, altering the amount of wind and sunlight that filters into the greenhouse. With 2,500 different varieties of plants and 1,500 varieties of pansies alone, Bob's produces approximately 7,000 different combinations of plants for sale.

FROM TOP Seated among his mums and produce, Mitch Meadows always looks at home at the Athens Farmers Market; Mums are one of Meadows' most popular flowers with customers.

One of the top 100 greenhouses in the U.S. in terms of square feet, the sprawling 20-acre facility was formerly the home of a driving range. *Greenhouse Grower* magazine includes Bob's Market in its annual top 10 plant producers list by number of plants produced per year, which is upwards of 150 million.

Owner Bob Barnitz began growing produce in Letart Falls, a small Meigs County town by the Ohio River, in the 1960s. At the time, he was working for a chemical company. By the 80s, much of Bob's success came from selling plants, and he left his job at the chemical company.

He realized that his greenhouses sat empty in winters because temperatures did not allow for much to grow through maturity. However, he began growing seedlings and shipping them south and to the East Coast where they could be transplanted. Soon, increasing profits demanded expansion. In the 90s, Ball Seed Co., the largest seed supplier in the world, approached Bob with the opportunity to become an exclusive seedling producer. In 1998, Bob's Market produced 7 million seedling plugs for Ball and by the following year, saw a fourfold increase to 28 million.

Bob's son, John Barnitz, explains that plugs, or seedlings, are young plants grown in individual cells from a single seed. These plugs can then be transplanted into containers or a garden. It is much easier to raise a garden starting from plugs than seeds, and the overall crop grow-time is significantly reduced. This helps growers with limited time or knowledge enjoy more success in their gardens.

"Consumers these days want something they can take home and it's already a complete, finished product," John says. "So we've been getting more into that. In our rooter/liner division, we carry a product called confetti. It's basically a little plug of soil and it has three individual plants of different species. And as they grow, they intermingle, and then you end up with a nice, mixed basket."

In all, Bob's Market employs 140 people year-round and approximately 280 during peak grow seasons, mid-spring to late summer. Of this number, 11 are family members, including Bob's five sons and two of his grandsons.

Bob's success planted the seeds for another family-owned and operated greenhouse, Mitch's Produce and Greenhouse in Middleport.

With the surname Meadows, Mitch may have been destined to be a grower from birth. When he was 15, he began experimenting with organic gardening on his back porch. During the summer of 1979, the bridge between Pomeroy and Mason was being repaired, and many of Bob's loyal customers could not access his greenhouse. Noticing the void, Mitch began to offer plants in Pomeroy, and his business took off. He has now been selling plants from his greenhouse for 18 years. He also sells to about 2,500 people a week at the Athens Farmers Market.

"You can venture into almost anything and everything here," Meadows says, looking around at the crowded market on a Saturday. "The diversity of people here is amazing. There's nowhere quite like here."

His mums are one of his most popular items at the Farmers Market, which is held Wednesdays and Saturdays on East State Street in Athens.

His son Zach has been working full time at the business since high school. His other son, Jaxon, helps out whenever he can after his high school classes.

Though both Mitch and Bob began to see business growth from their success in the 80s, the two outfits are quite different today. While operating costs, number of plants produced and profits enter in the millions for Bob's Market each year, Mitch's is more of a mom-and-pop business.

His 35-square-foot greenhouse produces approximately 30,000 plants a year between flats and baskets. His heating costs from natural gas only reach $15,000 annually. As opposed to Bob's annual 25,000 ferns, Mitch grows approximately 1,500 each year.

Mitch operates stores in Gallipolis and Middleport. Along with its headquarters in Mason, Bob's Market has branches in Belpre, Gallipolis and Atlanta, Georgia.

In addition to mums and pansies, customers of Meigs County's numerous greenhouses can find impatiens, vinca, herbaceous perennials, orchids and poinsettias, among many other popular flowers and plants.

Says Ricky Barnitz of their greenhouse philosophy: "We only have one way, the way Dad taught us: Pay attention to detail, treat everyone the way they want to be treated, and everything else will take care of itself." ◆

FROM LEFT Paul Kerns, Gary and Toni Sager, and Kellie Adams play traditional tunes at a club meeting.

The Sweetest Sound

The Big Scioty Dulcimer Club strings together Appalachian history and a harmonious community with the tranquil music of the mountain dulcimer

Story by **Meghan Malone** | Photos by **Kaila Busken**

Deft fingers slide across the fretted board of the dulcimer. The press of an index finger here, a quick strum there, and a charming, rustic lilt lifts from the strings on the wooden soundbox. Gary Sager, owner of Prussia Valley Dulcimers Acoustic Music Shop in Waverly, sits surrounded by his wife, Toni, friends Sonde and Alicia Sondergelt, and a medley of guitars, violins, banjos and dulcimers on the walls. Everyone is still as the gentle music hangs in the air. All eyes are on Gary and the instrument on his lap.

After he finishes the entrancing folk song, the last note fading away into silence, Sager raises his head. "If you translate dulcimer, it's 'sweet sound,'" Sager says. "Dulcimers are easy to play along with because it's just a seven-note scale—do re mi fa sol la ti do—like white keys on the piano. It's pretty easy to do."

And just as easy to fall in love with.

A few of those enchanted by the docile sound of the dulcimer are members of the Big Scioty Dulcimer Club, formerly known as the Scioto Valley Strummers. Named after the traditional fiddle tune "The Big Scioty," the club has met in Pike County every first and third Monday of the month since April 2009. Hosted by Gary and Toni Sager, about a dozen people from all over the region file into their music store to meet with friends, chat about life and music, and most importantly, play the dulcimer.

Appearing in the late 19th century among Irish and Scottish immigrants living in the Appalachian region, the Appalachian dulcimer or the mountain dulcimer belongs to the zither family, stringed instruments that, as opposed to a guitar, feature no neck. Autoharps and sitars are also examples of instruments that belong to this family of instruments, which are typically laid flat across the lap or a table in order to amplify the sound.

In the contemporary era, there are two categories of dulcimers: the hammered dulcimer—a zither with strings stretched across a trapezoidal soundboard—and the mountain dulcimer, which looks similar to an old-time lute or miniature guitar. Many consider the mountain dulcimer one of the easiest musical instruments to play, a fact that Sager believes helps to explain its increasing popularity.

"There are more people playing the mountain dulcimer than there's ever been," Sager says. The instrument was almost extinct in the early 1900s, he explains, but has returned as an American instrument. "There are at least five European instruments that have a fretted seven-note scale. But the mountain dulcimer, the way it is in the U.S. now, is different enough that it's considered an instrument of the U.S."

A longtime player, Sager also builds mountain dulcimers. He became interested in 1991 after catching a David Schnaufer music video on the Country Music Television channel.

"Well, it wasn't like anything that I'd ever heard before because, you know, it's soft," Sager says. "And the video that I saw him play, I thought it was amazing that you could get that much music out of something with three or four strings."

Sonde and Alicia Sondergelt, also longtime players of the dulcimer, have attended club meetings since its beginning, hailing it as a gathering for camaraderie and unity.

"It was something that we could do together," says Sonde, a retired music educator from Cincinnati, referring to his wife, Alicia. "And we both started at square one together. So we grew together on this journey. It was just something when we originally started with it, we didn't think anyone would want to hear us. And for a long time, we just played together. And it kept us close."

Utilizing both the charm of its instruments and its own wielded talent, the Big Scioty Dulcimer Club has had the opportunity to perform at various festivals and concerts, playing in venues such as the local senior citizen's home in Waverly, the Adena Mansion in Chillicothe and the Rail City Dulcimer Festival last April in Greenbow, Kentucky. "We made it a point that, even though we were playing a backwoods instrument, we still wanted to be and sound like we'd worked on it for a while," Gary says. "And we received a lot of compliments for our performance. It turned out really well."

Sager hopes to be able to play more venues in the future, while also promoting interest in the dulcimer with other people. The club also conducts workshops, hosts speakers and encourages learning from other dulcimer players, who range in playing in a traditional style—folk tunes, Old English songs, gospel—to more modern songs as well.

"We always played with a noter [a stick or quill used to play the dulcimer] in a more traditional style until we met Gary and Toni," Sonde says. "And our style changed because they've been all over the country and we have not. We have been strictly in Ohio. So our dulcimer was tuned differently than Gary's tuning. And we learned to play like Gary plays."

"Well," Alicia says, laughing, "the same tuning as Gary."

Members of the Big Scioty Dulcimer Club have their own stories of how they were introduced to the mountain dulcimer. Sonde began his dulcimer journey in 1972 while attending a music educators' national convention in Cincinnati.

"It was the sound that hooked us," Sonde says to echoes of agreement. During his visit, Sonde met Virgil Hughes, a famed dulcimer player from Denver who was performing at the convention. Never having seen a dulcimer before, Sonde inquired about it and went on to buy his own."I didn't know how to play it," Sonde says. "But I took it home and started to fiddle around with it, and [Alicia] liked it. So eventually we had to get two so we wouldn't have an argument about who's going to play it. And it just grew from there."

Gary and Toni Sager also shared a music experience as a couple, although Toni's choice of instrument has always been the autoharp, which she discovered her love for while attending an old-time music festival in 1991.

Other acoustic instrument players are welcomed and encouraged in the Big Scioty Dulcimer Club. Toni, for instance, provides the melody with her autoharp for songs that the dulcimer is unable to.

With developments such as the capo—a device used to hold down strings and change the pitch of the instrument—added frets on the fretboard and other advances, Gary hopes that through the club and more performances, more people will gain interest in the mountain dulcimer.

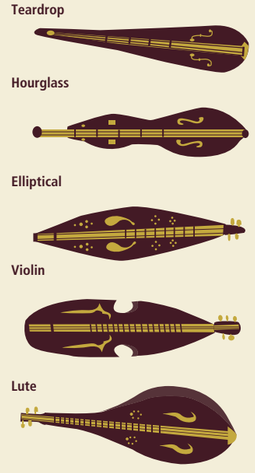
"It's just something that you can catch on to," Gary says. "You take what you're familiar with and use it on the dulcimer, and you can end up doing some things that kind of astonish people."

Astonish, indeed. The mountain dulcimer's Appalachian charm and honey-sweet sound are sure to enthrall additional audiences and players for years to come. ◆

FROM TOP Toni Sager plays her autoharp during a club meeting; Sonde Sondergelt accompanies the other musicians on his harmonica.

MELODIC FORMS

Though the shape of the dulcimer makes little difference to its sound, each unique shape and carved feature adds character and personality to the instrument.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAITLYN RICHERT

Shifting *Currents*

Small towns along the Ohio River surge with new energy as business ebbs and flows

Story by **Stefan Malmsten** | Photos by **Sarah Tilotta**

On Pomeroy's Main Street along the Ohio River, a building's ornate blue eaves shade black peeling paint that reads "Jeweler 1891." These facades hearken back to the time when coal and salt from the hills of Southeast Ohio financed an empire that would support a region for over a century. But at street level, these days, residents of Pomeroy look at signs that say, "Going out of Business Sale."

When coal and salt were discovered in new states, Southeast Ohio's stranglehold on the industry loosened, and the region bled jobs and population. But now, almost a century afterward, there is new blood in Pomeroy, and what is remembered as a bustling hub of growth is on the trajectory toward growth once again.

This past year, nine businesses in Pomeroy have either opened their doors for the first time or upgraded to doors that open into a bigger shop. Just down the river, Gallipolis, a denser city than Pomeroy in neighboring Gallia County, is home to several larger industries, but its small business riverfront downtown is also coming back into vogue. Both of these resurgences of culture and business wouldn't be the same without the help of local organizations.

FOX'S PIZZA DEN ON THE RIVER

When Matt Stewart decided to open his own branch of the local pizza chain, Fox's, he did so with four years of experience running his father's smaller location just up the road. It has been nine months since he opened the doors to this new location. With his wife, Kelsey, he now runs what is one of the most successful Fox's Pizza Dens in the nation.

The Stewarts, married last May, both grew up in Meigs County. Neither has any official culinary training, but Matt, who oversees the kitchen, learned from his father. Kelsey, who's in charge of the business and the wait staff, has a history of waitressing.

The plot of land now occupied by Fox's Pizza once belonged to the Blaettner family's Buggy and Buick dealership and factory. Even though this was back in the mid-1800s, the Blaettners are remembered for their family business, which started with building horse buggies and evolved to selling Buick automobiles.

One of the main cornerstones of the Stewart's business plans is bringing this family feel back to Pomeroy.

"I like to touch every pizza, or every customer that comes in here," Matt says.

And he means it literally. Whether he makes the pie for the customer or he shakes a regular's hand, Matt and Kelsey are rarely far from their restaurant.

When the restaurant upgraded its size, the Stewarts added 21 employees to their payroll, which, in a city with an unemployment rate two percentage points above the national average, was only good for the local economy.

This, and his commitment to customer satisfaction, is a lesson Matt says he took straight out of history.

"I have a high amount of respect for [the Blaettners], who had a business for that long," Matt says.

“My grandfather said that the river gets in your blood. I believe it.”

– PAIGE CLEEK

To the west of Pomeroy, the Ohio River dips sharply south.

A barge passes by the patio of Fox's Pizza Den where customers can watch river traffic as they enjoy their meal.

FRONT PAIGE OUTFITTERS

Paige Cleek and her two children were born and raised in Pomeroy. Now that the kids are both off at college, one at Ohio University and the other at Ohio State University, she has found a "new baby" in her retail shop on Pomeroy's Main Street.

After she graduated high school in Meigs County and received a degree from Ohio University, she and her husband moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he found work in construction. While working for a brief stint right after college in a jewelry store in Pomeroy, she said she got "the retail bug."

The first job she held in Atlanta was as a retail clerk in a department store, and she moved up the ladder until she became a buyer for Levi's and various other brands. In the early 90s, the Cleeks wanted to be closer to family and lived briefly in Columbus. This, however, proved to not be close enough, and in 1993, the Cleeks moved back home to Pomeroy, where they have been ever since.

Despite the transitions, Cleek's retail bug didn't stop biting, and her store, Front Paige Outfitters, is one of the nine stores to open in Pomeroy this past year.

Business is good for Cleek, whose shop will have been opened for one year this past November. Cleek credits the people and the river for her return to the area.

"My grandfather said that the river gets in your blood. I believe it," she says. "I love it here."

BRANDON BARTEE STUDIOS

The youngest of the new small business owners, Brandon Bartee is only 25. He and his fiancée, Rana, own and operate their photography studio out of Pomeroy, shooting everything from baby pictures to senior portraits to engagement photos.

Their loft photo studio has three large windows that look out on the river, a theme that is echoed in their master bedroom, just one block over.

Bartee, like many in Pomeroy, grew up in the town, left and ended up coming back.

These businesses bravely opened their doors in what is recognized as one of the worst economic downturns in the history of this nation. Why did they do it? Some of it may have to do with a new energy coursing through Pomeroy and its residents.

Out of the ashes of a defunct Merchants Association, a small business group that has been trying in recent years to re-energize Pomeroy's small businesses, has risen a faction called Imagine Pomeroy.

IMAGINE POMEROY

They are trying to restore Pomeroy to its original grandeur and make it a better place to visit, do business and find a job. Several large-scale projects are in the works, but it is the small things the group can do, Bartee says, that can really make a difference in the town.

Their Facebook group has over 2,500 "likes," and it is their use of social media, Bartee says, that separates Imagine Pomeroy from its predecessors. The last attempt to bring about community-wide change was around 15 years ago, he says, and while Imagine Pomeroy is still in its infancy, it is already beginning to make waves along the river.

Eloise Drenner, owner of Weaving Stitches, cites Bartee's energy as the primary catalyst for getting the ball rolling on actual change in the city. This is high praise as she has been doing business in Pomeroy long enough, 19 years to be exact, to have seen other people try, and fail, at Bartee's quest.

"We didn't have any intention to organize," Bartee says, "but we did, and we are starting to get stuff done." The first sign of Imagine Pomeroy's efforts was in late October, financed through T-shirt sales.

The first event was a community-wide Halloween block party, but residents, wary of a negative stigma from Athens' Halloween block party, dubbed the event Treat Street. More than 200 volunteers showed up for Bartee's event, which featured music, a costume contest and pumpkin decorating. Businesses along the riverfront stayed open late for trick-or-treating.

In order to start bigger projects, Imagine Pomeroy will need a larger source of income than T-shirt sales, but they are unable to accept large value donations or backing from corporate sponsors until their nongovernment organization status is approved. Bartee says this could take anywhere from three days to three months. Timing was not on their side as the application for the NGO status was sent in just days before the government shutdown last fall.

However, this standstill is not preventing the continued growth of Imagine Pomeroy. "We haven't asked a lot of owners to fix up their buildings," Rana says, "but people have been."

"Twenty of us cannot do everything," Bartee says. "It is a catalyst for change across the board." And this, Bartee stresses, is what Imagine Pomeroy is all about.

DOWN THE RIVER

Twenty miles of westbound travel along the river from Pomeroy brings one into the town of Gallipolis. There the two-year-old cousin of Imagine Pomeroy lives in a group known as the Digital River Project.

The DRP identifies itself as an "initiative to foster innovation, technological advancement and entrepreneurship" in the city. Alongside this commitment to good business is an emphasis on furthering the education of Gallipolis' youth and getting them to pursue careers in the area.

Already, they have been successful in the installation of a wireless access point in Gallipolis City Park.

More recently, the project hosted a 3-on-3 basketball tournament in downtown Gallipolis to get residents and out-of-towners into the downtown area. Committee member Jodie McCalla says that the turnout was much bigger than expected, with more than 55 teams showing up. Three days have already been selected for next year, instead of just two.

The main purpose of the event, however, was downtown awareness, and on that front, McCalla adds, Hoop Day was also successful. Rather than have food vendors in the park, she says, local businesses were encouraged to stay open. Parkfront Diner & Bakery, you guessed it, along the park, posted its best business day since it opened.

While the events they host are a large part of the Digital River Project, McCalla emphasized the group's commitment to fostering small business growth in Gallipolis as well.

"There is a lot of grant money for new businesses that is very easy to get," McCalla says. And this money could be used to pay for anything, from a new piece of equipment to expand a business, or a year's worth of rent for a new vendor.

"We are open to everything. The whole purpose of the group is to help people in an innovative way. We don't want to get stuck in a box that strictly defines what we do," McCalla says.

The one strict goal that the Digital River Project has, it shares with Imagine Pomeroy, and that is to re-energize these towns, attract people to the riverfront and foster growth in areas that used to be the epicenter of Southeast Ohio culture and trade.

ON THE RIVER

A stone's throw from Pomeroy across the river, in the shadow of the bridge connecting Pomeroy to Mason, West Virginia, is some of the best catfish fishing on the Ohio River.

It is there that the Ohio Hills Catfish Club has convened and hosted a tournament for the past seven years. Anglers from all over the state show up for the daylong event and try to catch the biggest catfish.

Janet Fox, a member of the Ohio Hills club, says that over the past years, the fish they have seen coming out of the river have been getting bigger. This is saying something, as the Ohio River is the most polluted waterway in the entire nation. A report released by Environment America in 2010 stated that over 32 million pounds of toxic discharge are dumped into the river every year. This is more than double the amount dumped into the next most polluted river, the Mississippi, which clocks in at 12.7 million pounds.

These facts do not dissuade local residents from swimming, boating, tubing or doing any other form of recreation known to man on the water.

"People are out there all day," Matt Stewart says as he looks off of his restaurant's deck onto the water. "Almost all year, people are finding ways to use the river."

The Ohio River is 981 miles long and touches six states. From its discovery, to the birth of the railroad, and even into present time, the river was and is an important means of transportation and source of life for a large populace.

Many towns are affected by its ebb and flow, not only in Southeast Ohio, but also throughout the Midwest. Only time will tell if the improvements will continue, but residents are optimistic, motivated and above all else, and perhaps most importantly, electric with excitement. ◆

FROM TOP Mike and Kristi Haskins enjoy boating on the river; Judges size up a catfish caught in competition.

DIRT ROAD *Diva*

Who says girls can't play with trucks? Trading scrubs for a fireproof suit, this registered nurse drives the big ones alongside the guys

Story by **Carina Belles** | Photo by **Ian Bates**

The mighty Samson looms just off a country road in Pickaway County, its metal-sculpted arms more menacing than its biblical namesake. The 2,000-horse-power beast weighs more than 10,000 pounds and is one of the most famous monster trucks in motor sports history. What's more, it's fueled by girl power.

Samson's current champion, 28-year-old Allison Patrick, lives a double life. By day, the Circleville native works 12-hour nursing shifts at the Berger Hospital intensive care unit, racing against the clock to save lives. On the weekends, she hits the road, crushing cars and jumping off school buses for thousands of spectators across the country. "Obviously, I like adrenaline," she says.

As the youngest daughter of motor sports legend Dan Patrick, this is the only life Allison could ever imagine. The little girl who used to cover her eyes and scream every time she watched her dad race now sits behind the wheel. However, the journey hasn't always been easy.

Driving a monster truck is nothing like driving a car. For

FROM TOP Allison Patrick poses by one of Samson's enormous 66-inch-tall wheels (Photo by **IAN BATES**); Allison and her father, Dan Patrick, prepare for one of her first shows (Photo provided).

one thing, monster trucks don't have doors. Once she's zipped up her fireproof suit and put on her massive helmet, Allison climbs up more than 6 feet into the belly of the beast. Samson's innerworkings look more like a rocket ship's control room than a car, but Allison knows exactly which buttons and levers will help her nail a 100-foot landing and which will leave her spinning in circles. The lifestyle isn't exactly easy, either. Allison works three 12-hour shifts a week at the hospital, leaves for shows on Thursday night, and typically won't get home until Sunday night. It might sound exhausting, but she makes it look easy.

Allison looks nothing like your typical extreme sports athlete. She favors colorful dresses, girly jean jackets and plenty of jewelry that set her apart from her predominantly male competitors. First and foremost, she's a woman—one of the only women to ever participate in monster truck driving. Only a handful compete professionally, and Allison is typically the only female performer at her events. Though she's only been competing since January 2013, Allison shows plenty of promise, and some of her male competitors aren't particularly happy about that.

"Some people don't like to get beat by a girl, but the sport has changed," Allison says. "You just have those people who think that motor sports are only for men."

Allison says most monster truck fans are boys under 10, and much of the sport is catered toward them. But Allison's proudest moments come from meeting the little girls in the audience—most of whom are totally shocked to see her behind the wheel. "They're like, 'you drive that?'" she says. "To see the look in their eyes when they come up and get autographs… they are so excited."

Allison's ultimate goal is to get more women involved in the sport. She cites a lack of early encouragement as the main reason little girls don't dream of growing up and becoming a monster truck driver.

Though her future in motor sports is bright, Allison will never give up nursing completely—she loves it too much. That branch of her career path came as a bit of a surprise to her parents, who thought she would go into sports marketing. They can't see their dirt road diva as the gentle caregiver her patients rave about. But Allison can't imagine a life without constant pressure.

"When patients come in, they've coded or something's gone wrong; I love it, and I thrive in it," she says.

The hot pink "Team Allie" shirt is one of the Patrick family's best selling T-shirts, and it's easy to see why. Allison's inherited more than just her father's racing skills. She has his charisma as well. Her parents don't hesitate to call her a drama queen—in a good way.

"She would get an attitude as a little girl," says her mother, Chris.

"I don't know where she got that," Dan jokes. His good-natured sarcasm is a big part of his appeal. He is a legend in the motor sports world, but he would never let you know it.

"We should have known she'd be a force to be reckoned with," her mother adds. Dan thinks it's this side of Allison that will keep her in the game for a long time.

"Our industry is way more than just performance," her father says. "It's personality. She's genuine; she's not going to turn it off. She'll treat a fan the same way when she's alone in a parking lot or in front of a crowd. We've instilled that in our family—we're here because of them."

Part garage, part museum, Patrick Enterprises is all about family. Childhood snapshots of Allison and her older sister Natalie playing in their "mini-monsters" hang alongside photos and memorabilia of Dan's time at the television show *American Gladiators*. The family lives in a modest home behind the

Samson crushes three scrapped cars at a monster truck event (Photo provided).

Allison Patrick signs autographs for her young fans (Photo provided).

garage, and they also have a test track for Allison to practice on, a far cry from the open field where she and Samson had their first disastrous truck-driving lesson.

Since it's almost impossible to see when you are in the driver's seat, Allison and Dan use walkie-talkies to communicate. That first day, their radios weren't synched properly, leaving Allison alone.

"Her dad thought she just wasn't listening to him, and she ran into the house crying," Chris says. "That wasn't a fun day."

Allison's involvement could soon change the sport forever. Now that Samson's helped her get her name out there, Allison hopes to debut a truck of her own next summer, one with considerably more girl power. "It's pink, it's leopard print, it's very girly," she says of her future ride.

"That's not going to happen anytime soon," her father jokes. "She can't drive anything that I wouldn't drive."

It's hard to imagine the imposing figure of Dan Patrick in anything leopard print, let alone hot pink. Not only has he been driving monster trucks for the past 25 years, he has built more than 100 trucks—inventing new parts and gears that have made the sport the crowd-pleaser that it is today. Patrick was the first to break the five-second barrier, the time it takes Samson to go from 0 to 60 mph.

Despite his larger-than-life charm, Patrick comes from much humbler roots. Born and raised in Pickaway County, he was a 17-year-old farmer who spent his spare time tractor pulling, an early motor sport that involves pulling a heavy sledge as far as you can. By the early 1980s, his hobby evolved into local arena shows, and he competed in the first motor sports event held at Madison Square Garden in 1984. "It all falls into luck," he says. "I thought it was going to last three or four years, and it's lasted a little longer than that."

By the late 1980s, Patrick was performing full time for a living, driving funny cars, an early type of drag racer, for Coors Brewery. He built the first dragster-style puller, and stumbled on Samson by accident in 1988 during a routine build. "I was going to sell a trailer, and I bought a monster truck instead," he says.

By the time his daughters were born, Patrick was on the road, traveling coast to coast for nearly 40 weeks out of the year, and he says he missed out on much of their childhood. "When [Allison] was born, I left the same day and went to an event in Houston," Dan says. "That's how I supported my family."

The Patricks are all about work. Though they have traveled all over the world together, they took their first-ever family vacation to Florida three years ago. Though Allison now lists her father as her biggest hero, his absence—he often spent more than 300 days a year on the road—did create distance between them.

Now that Allison and her father are on the road together, Dan says he feels like he is making up for a lot of lost time—even if he is occasionally teased for carrying her cheetah-print luggage around.

"She always wanted to be a mail lady in the day, and be a rock star at night," Chris says.

It's safe to say she's come pretty close. ◆

5 Great Hikes

Photos by **Joel Prince**

Southeast Ohio is home to a healthy collection of hiking destinations, and the best part is that each place has its own intrigue. Meander through patches of trees and step over fallen twigs. Fresh air fills your lungs while snapping branches and the movement of hidden creatures echo through the stillness. Our writers suggest the following five trails for your winter and spring treks.

— BENTLEY WEISEL

LAKE KATHARINE STATE NATURE PRESERVE

Jackson County's Lake Katharine State Nature Preserve is one of the state's best places in spring to see wildflowers and vegetation not typically seen in Ohio. Three nature hikes wind through the preserve's 2,019 acres, taking visitors past sandstone cliffs, deep ravines, and for those who look closely, native orchids.

Ohio University professor emeritus Philip D. Cantino favors the Calico Bush and the Salt Creek trails, which are each about 3 miles in length. "It offers scenic cliffs and rock shelters, several distinct kinds of forest and some plant species that are rare in Ohio."

The park's Pine Ridge Trail features groves of both bigleaf magnolias and umbrella magnolias, two rare deciduous trees special to the Appalachian Mountains region.

Cantino says a trip to Lake Katharine is like stepping out of Ohio. The flora bordering the Calico Bush Trail contains two magnolia species and hemlock and yellow birch trees that usually can be found in northern cooler climates with higher altitudes. "The combination is reminiscent of some of the forest stands in the Smoky Mountains National Park, far south of Ohio but much higher," Cantino says.

For visitors, it's almost a tropical experience. "The huge leaves of the umbrella magnolia overhead give parts of the Calico Bush Trail an almost tropical feeling, and, as their name suggests, provide an effective umbrella in light rain showers," Cantino says.

— EMILY VOTAW

HOCKING HILLS STATE PARK

Hocking Hills State Park is the region's mini Grand Canyon, with steep cliffs, deep ravines and rushing waterfalls that drop over recessed caves. Scenic overlooks and hikes through forests of eastern hemlock and birch abound in its six sections—Old Man's Cave, Cedar Falls, Ash Cave, Cantwell Cliffs, Rock House and Conkle's Hollow. But by far the most popular hiking trail is the Grandma Gatewood Trail.

"It has four significant waterfalls, rock features you won't find in other parks and good infrastructure for the hike," says Mary Reed, author of *Hiking Ohio: A Guide to Ohio's Greatest Adventures*.

The 6-mile trail connects Old Man's Cave to Cedar Falls and Ash Cave. Hikers can walk, duck or belly crawl through the Upper and Lower Gorge, where clear streams once sliced through the Blackhand sandstone to form deep recesses. Named after a black handprint that was sketched on a sandstone cliff overlooking the Licking River, Blackhand sandstone is a type of rock that can only be found in Southeastern Ohio. It is widely believed that the handprint was the work of Native Americans, who were using it as a signal to point to deposits of rock in Flint Ridge.

Grandma Gatewood Trail is a beautiful hike in any season. "Spring wildflowers are amazing there. You'll see trilliums, Dutchman's breeches—it's a little flower, kind of like a white pair of pants hanging on the line," Reed says. "In the summer, what's nice is that it's fairly cool on the trail itself. In the fall the leaves are changing color, and in the winter after a snow, it's really pretty, too."

The 1-mile Old Man's Cave Trail is perfect for families. For the hardy hiker, the Grandma Gatewood Trail offers a longer hike along a 300 million-year timeline of Southeast Ohio geologic history.

— JESS MILLER

ZALESKI STATE FOREST

Dense forests of beech, sycamore and hemlock trees fill the trails of Zaleski State Forest, cementing its place as one of the most beautiful hiking experiences in the Appalachian region. The second largest state forest in Ohio covers more than 28,000 acres of land in Vinton and Athens counties. It's a backpacker's dream.

"Appalachia is one of the most diverse regions. The biodiversity here is incredible," says Megan Marzec, a junior at Ohio University who studies studio art and outdoor education.

Marzec is a frequent hiker of the Zaleski State Forest Backpack Trail, a 23.5-mile route through the most historic and scenic features of the forest. She says the hike can be a challenge for those just beginning to backpack, so if you are the adventurous sort, make sure you are well prepared.

"There are lots of opportunities for medicinal plant hunting, for fibers and dyes," Marzec says, adding that there's something new to be found every season.

Native Americans first utilized the forests of Southeast Ohio nearly 12,000 years ago when they traveled through the region stalking big game. For generations they established trails, gathered seeds and berries, and harvested Zaleski flint, a black chipped rock used for arrowheads. Until European settlers began clearing the land for settlement in the 1700s, the forest remained largely untouched.

Backpacking and cross-country hiking is permitted throughout the forest, but camping is limited to designated spots only.

— JESS MILLER

STROUDS RUN STATE PARK

On warm days at Strouds Run State Park near Athens, Ohio University students and local residents enjoy swimming in Dow Lake and playing sand volleyball on the beach. But year-round, just beyond the dense tree line framing the lake, visitors can trek miles of trails winding through the park's 2,606 acres of hilly woods.

For those interested in a relatively easy, yet scenic hike, the 2.9-mile Hickory Trail hugs one side of the 161-acre lake's shoreline and is easily accessed from both park entrances. In spring, flowering dogwood and redbud trees abound. It's not unusual to hear beavers in the lake's inlets flapping their tails or to see white-tailed deer lurking on the trail.

A short side trail off of Hickory leads to Pioneer Cemetery, a reminder that this was once the home of Samuel and Charlotte Beach Gillett and their descendants. To see part of the family farmstead, follow the adjacent Trace Trail a short distance uphill.

With steep hills to climb and small creeks to hop across, this park's terrain lets hikers work up an appetite. But that's not a problem: The university town's many eateries are just a 10-minute drive away.

— KELLIE RIZER

Hocking Hills State Park

BOCH HOLLOW STATE NATURE PRESERVE

A trip to Boch Hollow State Nature Preserve north of Logan is like visiting two parks. The 570-acre nature preserve in Hocking County includes forests of oak, hickory, beech and maple as well as a 20-acre wetland.

The wetland offers close sightings of wildlife, including the park's playful and healthy beaver population. The transition from marshy swamp to deciduous forest is not aesthetically jarring. Instead, the Kessler Swamp slowly bleeds into the lush green and brown of the surrounding nature preserve in a balanced and natural way. The late Francis and Joyce Kessler donated the 20-acre wetland to Ohio's Division of Natural Areas and Preserves in 2002.

Four miles of hiking trails loop throughout the preserve. For those looking for a quiet respite or bit of exercise, the preserve also has a gazebo for a picnic lunch and a well-maintained basketball court.

— EMILY VOTAW

PIZZA MAKES THE MAN

Athens pizza master creates fun, artisanal pies that attract national attention

Story by **Chris Dobstaff** | Photos by **Laura McDermott**

One evening in the mid-1970s, a mousy-haired 14-year-old tentatively stepped out of his mother's station wagon in the back parking lot of Bimbo's Italian Restaurant in the small village of Palatine, Illinois, just north of Chicago. He approached the screened back door where he was soon sucked into a hectic world of suds, soap and dirty pans as Bimbo's newest dishwasher. The fast-paced world of food was completely new, yet when the steaming plates of loaded chicken parmesan and other delectable pasta dishes passed by, the boy's eyes grew wider and wider.

By the end of his first shift, John Gutekanst was hooked for life.

Now in his 50s, the amiable chef with a strawberry blonde goatee that frames his impeccable smile is as modest as can be when discussing his cooking career. But Gutekanst has little to be modest about. Throughout his life, he has worked with famous food personalities such as Julia Child at the Oak Room in Boston and Paul Bocuse at Ciel Bleu in Chicago. Everywhere he went, he studied and absorbed the innovative methods of his mentors, which allowed him the opportunity to do something crazy on his own in 2000.

He opened a pizza shop in Athens.

"I had been working 17 hours straight, seven days a week at bars and hotels and I just wanted a change for a while," Gutekanst says about his nonstop lifestyle prior to moving to Ohio. Opening Avalanche Pizza gave the exhausted chef two much needed options: the ability to take some time off and relax, and complete creative control in his own kitchen. Nowadays, Gutekanst utilizes one of those more than the other.

From the start, Gutekanst became entrenched in the community surrounding Avalanche Pizza. "I jumped on the Athens bandwagon a long, long time ago when Bill Shores from Green Edge Gardens talked me into buying local produce," he says. "And that right there is better than advertising. You put your money into the community, and the community will take care of you."

That local produce, from the mountains of vegetables that line the shelves of his massive walk-in cooler to fresh feta and goat cheeses from Integration Acres in Albany, has become a staple of what make Avalanche pizza so delicious. Each topping is fresh, not frozen, which adds extra bursts of tastes not found at corporate pizza chains.

"I call it 'The Conundrum,'" Gutekanst says. "Because you're in business to make a profit. And you can make a huge profit if you just pull crap out of the freezer and it's got all of these chemicals on it and there's not waste. But your product is crap. It really is."

By keeping such high-quality ingredients in stock, Gutekanst builds relationships with the local farmers in the area. Chris Chmiel of Integration Acres, which has been providing the region with delicious pawpaws as well as goat's milk and cheeses for nearly two decades, says that his relationship with John has grown into a partnership of sorts over the years. "He likes to come out and take pictures and bring his kids out [to the farm]," Chmiel says. "Every week we trade for cheese, so I go down there and give him some of my goat cheese and we trade for pizza."

Combining the seemingly endless toppings, from artichoke hearts to Korean kimchee, Avalanche Pizza now serves 28 signature pies such as the Chicken Yakitori pizza (complete with teriyaki-glazed chicken, garlic-spiced kimchee, mandarin oranges and a creamy Asiago-béchemel sauce) and The Ted Nugent (salami, roasted chicken, bacon, ham, premium pepperoni, rib eye steak and Italian meatballs, anyone?) Although the signature pizzas feature gourmet ingredients, Gutekanst and his crew also include reasonably priced specials and deals on

> "You put your money into the community, and the community will take care of you."
>
> **– JOHN GUTEKANST**

hand for customers in the area who want or can only afford a more traditional pie.

A big city chef can't completely shed the spotlight, however. Over the years, Gutekanst has traveled the world, entering Avalanche Pizza into countless competitions and more often than not, taking a prize home for his small pizza joint on East State Street. From the Best Gourmet Pizza in the Midwest at the 2010 Las Vegas Pizza Expo to the first place finish for the U.S. at the 2008 World Pizza Championships in Salsomaggiore Terme, Italy, the chef is always pushing to come up with a better creation than the year before.

In October, Gutekanst competed at Food Network's La Sagra Sunday Slices event in New York City. With more than 30 of the nation's best pizza minds competing against one another, the Athens representative wanted to make something special.

And he succeeded. Utilizing a model for a chocolate and Nutella pizza, Gutekanst went to town, concocting a chocolate crust featuring Negra Modelo beer for added flavor. The real treat came with the toppings. The chef removed the centers of day-old baguettes and soaked them in a creamy mixture of milk and almond paste with ricotta and mascarpone cheese to make an irresistible bread pudding. Combined with chopped bananas and a healthy drizzle of Nutella, the chocolate bread pudding pizza won over the judges.

"I've been in this business so long, and that's something I've learned. When you do stuff like this, make sure that people can't really look away," he says.

Gutekanst has a never-satisfied attitude when it comes to pizza and baking. Even when not competing, the lifelong chef continually experiments in the Avalanche kitchen to find the next item that will impress his customers.

"You break the boredom. The worst thing in the world is being in a slave ship, even one that you create, and rowing over and over again," Gutekanst says. "Some find solace in that, but not me. If something looks good and tastes good, it's a 'wow.' You've got to have at least five 'wows' when you walk into a restaurant now."

Finding those "wows" is a constant mission for the Chicago-raised foodie. But like any knowledgeable chef, Gutekanst

John Gutekanst spreads a mixture of fresh, local ingredients on top of an Avalanche artisan pie.

knows that he must find the right balance between the tastes of his customers and his extensive knowledge of worldly ingredients and flavors.

"The worst thing you could ever do is say 'ew.' I've heard adults say 'ew' or 'yuck,' and it's the most immature thing ever. And it's indicative of closed culinary minds, and I like to keep people's open," he says. "So it's a nuanced thing. Some ingredients need to be nuanced, and others don't. Once I get people hooked on artichoke hearts on their pizza, there's only one place they're going to come to. And once you get them hooked, you're that dealer on the corner, man."

Despite his international success, Gutekanst stands firm in his commitment to the Athens community. Even with a European Union trophy for a gourmet pizza with mugolio syrup (a thick Italian pine syrup) and blueberries, as well as the selection of his story "Truffle in Paradise" for Best Food Writing 2012, Gutekanst says that the accomplishment he's most proud of is winning the award for Best Pizza in Athens every single year since 2000. "It's the people here, they're my customers," he says before jokingly adding, "To hell with everyone else in the world."

Operating a pizza shop in a college town ensures that Gutekanst has employed a large force of Ohio University students over the years. Recent graduate Jacob Hock, a delivery driver, says that working with Gutekanst is an intense but rewarding experience. "He can be a little quick, but he's never too serious," says Hock, who also does work in the kitchens and around the shop. "There's never any real tension coming from his part. He'll correct you, but it's never in a condescending way. He's always got three things on his mind so he's always wanting you to be able to fix things quickly."

The college crowd has worn off on Gutekanst, who readily admits to picking up on the language of his workers and using it in everyday life and around his wife, Ohio University voice professor Debra Rentz. "Deb and I went to this cocktail party once and it was all professors and older people," Gutekanst says. "And this woman comes up to Deb and goes, 'So your husband called me dude three times during our conversation. What's up with that?' I've been working way too much, man."

The work he does isn't always with his own employees, either. Gutekanst often welcomes classes from East Elementary School into the store to teach them the basics of baking and creating a great pizza. He also conducts a pasta junior chef school at the Athens Farmers Market at least once a year, most recently teaching a group of elementary-aged kids, complete with white chef hats, the ins and outs of squid ink pasta.

"The farmers market is my incubator," he says, and he doesn't just mean for the new recipes he's constantly coming up with. Gutekanst's willingness to be a teacher in the small community sheds light on just how little time off he's been able to take since moving to the more "quiet" life in Ohio. When he's not sweating in the kitchens at Avalanche or traveling to another country to learn more about the art of making pizza, you can find him teaching a weekly artisan baking class at Hocking College or holding seminars for at-risk youths detailing the best strategies for finding a job. His weekly planner is seemingly endless, yet in the end he's not staying busy for his own sake, but rather to have an impact on someone else.

Still, it all comes down to pizza, the food that made him leave behind his extravagant lifestyle in the big cities. "Pizza is usually the bottom rung of the culinary business," he explains. "But you know what? You can be as artistic as possible with pizza. It's got so many elements to it." With Gutekanst in charge, the artistry has never tasted so good. ◆

A hands-on approach is used to relax a student at Inhale Yoga in Athens.

Just Breathe

More and more Southeast Ohioans are joining yoga classes across the region. Southeast Ohio magazine visited four studios to find out what the fuss is all about.

Story by **Kellie Rizer** | Photos by **Olivia Wallace**

Kara Roberts holds a yoga pose that requires balance and flexibility.

Raindrops tapping on the building's roof accent the sounds of heavy breathing. Sweat drips down your back, forehead, fingertips and rolls off your nose. You focus on a piece of fuzz on the hardwood floor and concentrate on breathing in and out—this simple task requires all your energy as the seconds pass like hours. The heat of the room weighs down on you. Your body aches; muscles screaming in protest fight your willpower, coaxing you to give up.

"And release," a cool voice whispers.

Your body relaxes as you lower your arms and legs and roll into Child's Pose. Suddenly, the previous moment's challenge transforms into relaxation and euphoria. You don't even notice the storm passing by outside.

In an era of smartphones, social networking and reality TV, finding the time and space to just "be" is nearly impossible without making a conscious effort to shut out the stress and noise.

In recent decades millions of Americans, many in Southeast Ohio, have used yoga to keep their stress at bay. Yoga enthusiasts have several options of studios or teaching styles for their personal preferences. Whether you are seeking a high intensity, heart-pounding workout or the gentle calm of deep meditation, studios throughout Southeast Ohio offer an array of options.

INHALE YOGA

Views overlooking uptown Athens and the sky above reminded Michelle Stobart of skyscraper studios found in bigger cities; she wanted to replicate the feeling of being in a cloud, far away from the worries below. The studio's airy atmosphere is accentuated by Stobart's calming presence and gentle voice that could lull most people to sleep in minutes. Inhale has been her primary vision since its beginning.

The main street in uptown Athens, which hosts a steady stream of people rushing to work, dodging traffic and making coffee runs before class, may not seem like an ideal location for a space intended for meditation and relaxation. Stobart, the studio director and senior teacher at Inhale Yoga, has done just that—creating a peaceful oasis for yoga students.

The studio welcomes guests into a large, open space filled with green, leafy plants in nearly every corner. Natural light floods into the various rooms through floor-length windows situated along the far walls, which are painted cool, calming shades of blue and green.

"I always had a personal feeling of something missing. I started practicing yoga [in 1997] and finally felt full," Stobart says.

In 2003, she received her training as a yoga instructor and by 2004, Inhale Yoga was up and running in Williamstown, West Virginia. Three years and two locations later, Stobart settled in Athens to be closer to her family. Inhale's staff fluctuates from six to eight teachers at any given time, including Stobart. Inhale's approach to yoga specializes in Vinyasa, a flow-based movement, as well as yoga therapy. Stobart offers many other options, including gentle flow classes and pre- and postnatal yoga.

"We offer yoga for everybody and see wellness as a whole approach," Stobart says. "All ages, body types and special needs are welcome."

Apart from what are considered to be typical yoga classes, the studio has ventured into adult and children's painting classes, which can be another form of meditation. Resident painting instructor Keith Wilde's paintings of animals and nature are displayed around the studio. Healthy cooking classes, paddleboard yoga, massage therapy and sauna sessions are also regularly offered to clients.

"We are more than just a yoga studio," Stobart says. "We set out to be a wellness center and encourage our members to keep in touch with their creative sides."

The growing popularity of yoga in Southeast Ohio comes as no surprise to Stobart, who credits both the increase in

Michelle Stobart of Inhale Yoga helps a class member stretch.

traveling and the hardships of stressful work and family lives with sparking people's interest.

"There are more high stress jobs, and we work to maximize happiness and give people that hour and a half of peace to be connected in the moment," Stobart says.

As an ambulance blaring its sirens speeds past the studio, momentarily disturbing the serenity of the room, Stobart simply glances outside and, turning back toward the center, smiles.

"Everyone strives for this perfect moment, instead of settling into the imperfection," she says. "My philosophy is to leap and the universe will provide the net."

YOGA IN THE HILLS

Many yoga enthusiasts believe that yoga strengthens the bond between a person's spirit and nature. Rather than limiting classes within four walls, Yoga in the Hills has taken its practice of yoga outdoors. The program, which travels to several tree-covered locations in the Hocking Hills, is an extension of Blue Valley Massage. Yoga instructor Shirley McClelland and resident masseuse Hollie Merchant work together to provide their clients with relaxing and fulfilling experiences.

"Many yoga classes are held in loud gyms, which hinder reaching a peaceful frame of mind," Merchant says. "There is nothing like doing yoga outside in a quiet, peaceful atmosphere."

In five years, Yoga in the Hills has evolved to several classes of up to 20 people each week.

During the spring and summer months, McClelland offers sessions on outdoor decks in various locations. Family reunions, work retreats, tourists and friend getaways are some of the different ways that customers that take advantage of open-air yoga. In the wintertime, classes move inside to the Lancaster studio.

"We love having visitors; they bring a whole new level of energy," Merchant says. "Our program is flexible and easily customized to each group."

In fact, Yoga in the Hills is so accommodating that it will bring its services directly to guests of cabins in the Hocking Hills area. McClelland will travel to couples or larger groups staying in cabins for a rate of $50 per session. Pricing for regular classes is $10 per person. Most classes are a restorative and strength training form of yoga with guided meditation at the end, but group members are encouraged to make suggestions for the pace and atmosphere of the class.

"Every group that does yoga benefits from it, especially in the peace and spirituality of the Hocking Hills," Merchant says. "Doing Sun Salutation under the sun is just awesome."

STUDIO OM YOGA

Five years ago, Julia Hathaway was in alcohol recovery and found personal healing in practicing and teaching yoga. She opened Studio Om in a renovated 1800s boarding house with the help of a group of people interested in starting a yoga studio in Pataskala. In April 2013, Kelley Grant-Kelley and Brian Kelley, a couple who got hooked on yoga during Hathaway's classes, took over ownership of the Licking County studio.

Grant-Kelley, a fantasy and science fiction novelist and freelance graphic designer, began watching yoga DVDs in her

Mat poses include ones with names like Downward Dog and Child's Pose.

home. She studied to become a yoga instructor and has now taught more than 400 classes. She describes working with her husband, who works as a mechanical engineer in Columbus, and instructing several classes each week as "a labor of love."

"We offer a variety of classes for all different types of bodies and activity levels," Grant-Kelley says. "Our beautiful facility has the same beams and structures from the old building, which accent the new."

She says that anyone can do yoga, despite lack of flexibility. "Yoga is more than touching your toes, " she explains. This philosophy of accepting one's body and enhancing personal strengths has influenced Studio Om's techniques and services. Each week, the studio offers 15 classes covering yoga, tai chi and Pilates. Tai chi, similar to slow and fluid martial arts, encourages participants to quiet the mind while performing a continuous flow of choreographed movements.

Several seminars and workshops are given throughout the year, including free community meditation events, seasonal festivals and celebrations. During equinox and solstice celebrations, members perform 108 Sun Salutations. Specialized classes for expectant mothers, parents and children, and Native American drumming and social chanting make physical health and emotional connections.

"Yoga uses meditation as a way to reveal the beautiful light within ourselves that our daily lives covers up," Grant-Kelley says. "We focus and meditate to see our beauty and release any anger and frustration."

Grant-Kelley, who struggles with seasonal affective disorder, has found yoga to be a relief during the winter months "when you just want to crawl into bed."

"People in yoga classes are so welcoming and build a sense of community that helped me at a time when I didn't even know if I would survive the winter," she says.

Maintaining a moving body and focusing on mental health can improve various ailments. She cites possible results as lowered blood pressure, injury rehabilitation, increased flexibility and a more optimistic view on life's challenges.

"People start so anxious and learn techniques to quiet their mind," Grant-Kelley says. "The magic is when someone cuts you off in traffic and you just let it go."

FULL CIRCLE YOGA

Allie Bennett's passion and appreciation for yoga led to an opportunity she could not turn away—taking ownership of Full Circle Yoga in Vienna, West Virginia, in May 2013.

"I fell in love with yoga, but never thought it would be a business pursuit [of mine]," Bennett says. "Then, Full Circle became available, and I just couldn't pass it up."

Veteran yoga instructor Lori Tofaute owned and operated Full Circle Yoga for several years before Bennett and her husband became its owners. Tofaute specialized in a form of yoga that incorporates 26 different postures and two breathing exercises through a "moving meditation." At the studio, the instructors refer to this type of yoga as the "Hot 90 Series" because the 90-minute classes are exactly the same every time. Held in a 100-degree room, the classes are intended to be challenging.

Full Circle balances high intensity sessions with a selection of more moderate training, such as pre- and postnatal classes, heated and non-heated Vinyasa flow classes and chair yoga for individuals with limited mobility. The studio has a staff of yoga instructors with diverse backgrounds and expertise, as well as two licensed massage therapists.

The open door, community-based atmosphere of Full Circle has led to involvement in Parkersburg area charities. Studio clients can make donations to organizations, such as Christmas Child, a program benefitting families in need during the holiday season, and the Salvation Army. Bennett's family has been active in these organizations for years and she feels that the studio could be a valuable approach to give back to the community.

"We definitely have a good base of people who make our studio really supportive and laidback," Bennett says. "We try to listen to their needs and offer free classes once a month, so that people can experience different instructors instead of going to the same one."

Meditation classes, a new addition to the schedule, teach clients methods for quieting the mind through breathing techniques and focusing on the task at hand. The mental and spiritual branches of yoga are as essential to success as the physical aspect—disconnecting from the stress of the day can be as difficult as mastering an advanced pose.

"Everyone needs both a workout and mental break," Bennett says.

Full Circle Yoga has created a facility with services catering to a variety of individuals with varying skill levels and goals.

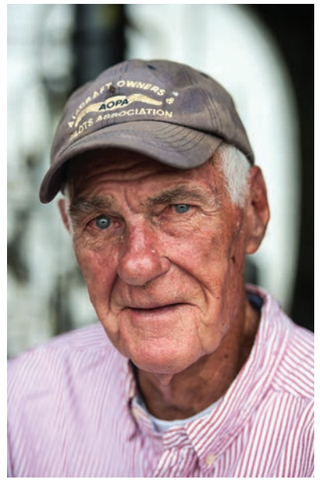
"We believe that yoga should be accessible to everyone, especially in an area that doesn't have a studio on every corner," Bennett says. "Our goal is to make yoga less intimidating in a non-competitive environment." ◆

IN *Plane* VIEW

Dedicated pilots and aviation enthusiasts keep the Vinton County Airport flying high

Photos by **Jason Chow**

Steve Keller scans the horizon at the Vinton County Airport near McArthur.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP The Vinton County Airport opened in 1970 after Gov. James Rhodes' 1967 decision that every county in Ohio was to have an airport.

Jim "Who" Wilson, David Baker and John "Thud" Casper look to the skies during a radio control plane stunt at the Vinton County Air Show in September.

Ohio University's DC-3 airplane sits on the runway during the Air Show. Pilots flew in their planes from various parts of Ohio for the event, which is held the third Sunday of every September.

Tom Wilkinson, a 16-year member of the Vinton County Airport Flyers & Booster Association, keeps his 1948 Navion at the airport.

Josh Stevens, left, and Matthew Jarrells, right, walk their dogs in the open fields of Southeastern Correctional Institution.

Prison Paws

At Southeastern Correctional Institution, rehabilitation takes on new meaning as inmates train shelter dogs for life outside the fence

Story by **Nikki Lanka** | Photos by **Susannah Kay**

The unit where Matthew Jarrells and Josh Stevens sleep in Southeastern Correctional Institution (SCI) may be one of the loudest sections in the facility, but it's probably the least lonely.

That's because each of the 20 men sleep in open-style bunk beds next to dogs they will train for the next five or more weeks. Regional animal rescue groups select the puppies from humane societies and area residents adopt them once training is complete.

In 2013, the institution near Lancaster in Fairfield County prepared more than 100 dogs for adoption.

The original intent of the program is to make the dogs more adoptable, says Assistant Warden Karrie Hupka. When people adopt out dogs who haven't been trained, the dogs often end up being returned. "From there, it grows into giving [inmates] responsibility," she says. What begins as a training exercise for both man and dog evolves into friendship.

Jarrells, from Scioto County, is caring for a 6-month-old boxer mix named Tank. Tank lives up to his name in brute strength, but he doesn't stop licking whatever dangling hands and feet he sees while his caregiver speaks. A soft command from Jarrells brings him back to sitting position, but nothing wipes the pleased look off Tank's face.

Tank and the dog at Stevens' feet, Lady, are best buds. She's a sandy brown terrier mix who is 4 months old and curious as can be.

The inmates spend 24 hours a day with their dogs. They brush their teeth, groom them and take them out for exercise to the large valley on the grounds. At night, they put their dogs to bed at the foot of their own bunks. "It's just like a baby," Jarrells says. "When they first come in, you're up all night."

Inmates train their dogs to choose one spot for their bed, walk on a leash and obey commands such as sit, stay and down. The men receive training in skills such as Pet First Aid certification and basic animal health care through classes, books and videos.

One of Jarrells' previous dogs was found with a bullet hole in his chest. He trained him for five months—although the more typical stay at the correctional facility is six to 10 weeks. The adopter later sent back a picture and let Jarrells know they took the dog to obedience training in Pickaway County. He won first place in his class. (*Continued on page 46.*)

FROM TOP Matthew Jarrells sits with Tank, a 6-month-old boxer mix; Dogs learn to sleep on beds between the inmates' beds, though they sometimes jump onto the mattresses to curl up in their trainers' blankets, Jarrells says.

Some dogs, like Lady, learn quickly. Others are stubborn. "You learn something new every day," says Stevens, a Warren County native. "Different dogs teach you different things."

A huge issue for some of the dogs is socialization. SCI asks the rescue groups to temperament-check the dogs, explains Mag Wright, a coordinator of the program. Dogs that are too timid can be too hard to train, and dogs that are too aggressive won't behave well in the institution's open fields.

Some dogs they receive for training haven't left a crate or been off a chain their entire lives. But coordinator Lora Stotts has seen many dogs come out of their shells since she came to the correctional facility in 2005.

"I've taken some before and after pictures of some dogs that have been here right when they first got here," Wright says. "You can just see the fear in their eyes. And then like a month later I'll do another picture, and they're just proud as can be. It's amazing."

Dog training is neither Wright's nor Stotts' primary job at the institution. Stotts is a unit manager, watching the group of men in the training program; Wright works in the mailroom. Yet they dedicate a great deal of time training the men, setting up for visitations, doing paperwork and tending to the needs of both men and dogs.

Stotts used to work at a guide dog program at Hocking Correctional Facility in Nelsonville. She remembers seeing the men, some of whom had been convicted of murder, hand over their dogs with tears streaming from their eyes. Then they would be given their new puppy to train, and it would lap up all the moisture on its new trainer's cheeks without a care in the world.

Stotts never sees any fights between inmates in the unit where she works. Knowing they will be kicked out of the dog training program if they get into trouble is enough incentive for the men to keep their toes in line. All the panting, barking and blissful frolicking of the dogs of all ages and sizes changes the atmosphere, too.

"Get a depressed guy," Stotts says. "He's in prison; he's not feeling so good. Now, he has a companion. Now he has someone to talk to, now he has something to identify with. And I think that just brings them out of their shell. It also helps them to focus on something other than their incarceration."

"And some of these old timers here, they don't have anyone," Wright adds. "That's their family, their dog."

In the three years Stevens has participated, he's trained more than 20 dogs. Jarrells, a trainer for just a year, has trained six.

When released, both men plan on adopting whatever dog they are training at the time. Stevens has two years left; Jarrells, five. He'll be returning home to one child who is 11 and another who turned two on Christmas Day.

"When you see the dogs come in and they're shy, and they've been treated bad, and then you watch them progress with the other dogs and you sit up there and just watch them grow, it's nice to watch them go to good homes," Jarrells says, looking at Tank. "I'm getting attached to him quick. He's awesome."

Tank responds with a lick of Jarrells' palm and a slobbery grin, clearly feeling the same. ◆

8 *out of* **9** correctional facilities in Southeast Ohio participate in dog training programs.

Southeastern Correctional Institution works with four different rescuers to find dogs to train:

- Second Chance Companions **FAIRFIELD COUNTY**
- SPOT **MORGAN COUNTY**
- Perry County Humane Society
- Three Sisters Pet Rescue **HAMILTON COUNTY**

SOUTHEASTERN CORRECTIONAL FACTS

Opened in **1980**

Total acreage **1,377**

Population as of 10/13 **2,054**

SECURITY LEVELS

MINIMUM SECURITY 978

MEDIUM SECURITY 1,073

CLOSE SECURITY 3

SOUTHEAST OHIO
Scripps Hall • 1 Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701-2979

A collection of wine tasting cups at Moyer Winery & Restaurant displays the vineyard's offerings. **PAGE 8**